



Al-Risala 1987

August

2 August 1987

Editorial

The conscience of the entire country has been shaken by the communal riots in Delhi and Meerut in May 1987. It should be said to the credit of the national press that, in general, its reports have been fair and objective, and editorials – even the letter columns – have been balanced in their viewpoint.

The thinkers and writers of the country have shown how disturbed they are by the atmosphere of tension, conflict and bitterness prevailing between the two communities. Even Mr. K.R. Malkani, ex-editor of the *Weekly Organiser*, has, astonishingly enough, published an article on the subject in the *Statesman*, May 30, 1987, which does it full justice.

I have no hopes, however, that these articles and comments can produce the desired result. This is because they are all so unspecific in tenor. There is no really pointed criticism; rioters and communal elements have been condemned only in general. Such sermonizing is ultimately useless, because everyone exonerates himself by the simple expedient of laying the blame upon others. This goes on until finally there is no one left to blame.

Correct and constructive criticism is that which points specifically to those indulging in nefarious activities. But the situation is complicated by the fact that the perpetrations fall into two opposing categories of Hindus and Muslims. If a Hindu criticizes Muslim elements such criticism will be regarded by the latter as prejudiced, will be discounted as such, and will, therefore, be ineffective. And vice versa.

The situation being as it is, the only practical form of useful and effective criticism is that made by leading Muslims of the behaviour of their own community, and, similarly that made by leading Hindus of the behaviour of their own community. Such criticism needs to be immediate and severe.

If this suggestion were adopted by both communities, I am sure that new thinking would emerge on both sides, thus making it possible to control the riots.

Police Violence: An Objective Approach

Communal violence is one of the most talked of subject these days, and discussions thereon are dominated by the fact that the brunt of police violence has to be borne by the Muslims. "The police are killers," say Muslims. Their theme song is that the brutalities of Adolf Hitler and Chengiz Khan pale into insignificance beside what the police inflict on innocent citizens.

At face value, this would appear to be correct. But we must pause and give greater thought to the actual reasons for police 'misconduct'. Why should it take place at all? If we marshall all of the facts, we see that in every case, the situation has been aggravated more by the Muslims in question being easily provoked than by a desire on the part of police to be aggressive. And it is noteworthy that wherever Muslims are to be found living together in any concentration, this over-sensitiveness is very much in evidence; sooner or later, it is the Muslims themselves who have to pay dearly for it at every level.

Instances of present-day Muslims fighting amongst themselves are not uncommon. Due to some historical reasons they are easily insulted and then they become over-emotional. However, when it is a case of Muslim fighting Muslim, the quarrel is at least confined to the individuals concerned and does not, therefore, go beyond all normal civilized limits. But when the fight is between a Muslim and a Hindu, no matter how minor the provocation it very soon takes on a communal hue, and the price has to be paid by the whole community.

The worst kind of situation which develops in this way culminates in a confrontation with the police, or in U.P., with the PAC—The Provincial Armed Constabulary. No one seems to take into account the fact that if you pelt armed policemen with stones, they will retaliate with bullets. Why should they not make use of their superior weapons? While fighting with stray individuals is like playing with matches, fighting with the police is like playing with bombs. Why should we expect that the result will be anything other than general carnage?

One glaring example of this is the incident which took place in the Idgah at Moradabad on the 13th August, 1980. It was a case of pigs having been found within the precincts of the Idgah, at which the Muslims became highly enraged. The police officer on duty pleaded with the Muslims to remain calm and assured them that they would deal with the situation and that the culprits would be punished. But the Muslims were too incensed to listen to what the police had to say, and began pelting them with stones. The police officer himself was hit, and fell down seriously injured. Now it was the turn of the police to be provoked, and, of course, they did not discard their rifles in favour of stones. Ultimately it was the Muslims who suffered the most disastrous of consequences. And all because of their own ungovernable tempers.

It is clearly the Muslims who are the losers, whether at the individual or at the communal level, yet they do not stop to think of the ferocity with which reprisals will be carried out when they themselves have given into provocation, lashing out at all and sundry. They think it is like aiming a blow at a domestic animal which, if it reacts at all, will do so mildly and without rancour. They do not stop to consider that when they lash out in a frenzy of emotionalism, it is a savage wild beast with which they have to deal – an untamed monster, which will fight back with tooth and claw. The culminating point of their endeavour will be the inevitable backlash of police brutality.

Events having shown that Muslims clash not only with Hindus, but also with the police – they themselves paying the most devastating price for having allowed their sense of provocation to get out of hand – we should now ascertain where to lay the blame. Clearly, the greatest offenders are the journalists and leaders of the Muslim community itself. After each and every riot they cannot find words enough to describe the “brutality and savagery” of the police; in consequence, Muslims sentiments are kept perpetually on the boil. Their anger against and hatred for the police are never allowed to simmer down. As a result, whenever the police appear on the scene, they become enraged and hit out at them, trying by all possible means to humiliate them. This belligerent attitude on the part of Muslim newspapers and leaders is the root cause of the tense mutual hatred between Muslims and police.

The sole solution to the problem is to be found in the Quran, which bids us return good for evil: “Good and evil deeds are not alike. Requite evil with good, and he, between whom and you there is enmity, will become your dearest friend” (41: 34).

The result of acting out of goodness is that it has a softening effect on the enemy – to the point where he becomes a friend. Even the PAC would not be immune to such social palliatives. They are, after all, just human beings like everyone else, and would surely be open to an amicable and reasonable approach.

5 August 1987

The Value of Knowledge

At an informal gathering on February 5, 1987, Mr. Abdur Rahman Antulay, Barrister-at-Law and former Chief Minister of Maharashtra narrated an incident which took place in 1954 when he was studying law at the Council of Legal Education in London. His English professor, elaborating upon a point of law during his lecture, told of how a large – scale factory had suddenly come to a halt, foiling all attempts of the engineers to re-start it. Finally, an expert had to be called in. Taking a round of the factory to inspect the machinery, he stopped at one point and asked for hammer. When it was brought, he struck one particular part of one of the machines, and this set everything in motion again.

The expert then took himself off and sent them a bill for £100. Thinking that this seemed excessive, the factory manager wrote back to him, "You hardly did any work. A bill for £100, for just one blow of a hammer, is beyond our comprehension. Kindly furnish my client with further and better particulars". The expert replied that the bill was quite in order. £99.19 to diagnose the disease and one shilling to pick up the hammer and strike the right spot.

Knowledge is of inestimable value in this world. Likewise, awareness of God shall be of the highest value in the Life after death. The position that one attains in the Hereafter shall be exactly according to the level of one's awareness of God.

6-7 August 1987

Aiming Directly at the Target

The American Writer, Charles Garfield, who has made a thorough, psychological study of peak-achievement, says that "in a study of 90 leaders in business, politics, sports and arts, many spoke of 'false starts' but never of 'failure.' Disappointment spurs greater resolve, growth or change. Moreover, no matter how rough things get, super-achievers always feel there are other avenues they can explore. They always have another idea to test."

(*Readers' Digest*, October, 1986).

The writer emphasizes the fact, however, that these high achievers are neither superhuman, charismatic nor even singularly talented, what they do have in common is an 'uncanny knack for increasing the odds in their favour through simple techniques that almost anyone can cultivate.' He delineates five major areas of concern. First and foremost, one must have a great sense of mission, and a strong desire to turn everything that comes one's way to good account. Secondly, one must be result-oriented, so that one is not just preoccupied with unceasing activities, but with a definite outcome of one's efforts. Thirdly, one has to take stock of whatever knowledge and skills one has and bring out whatever is latent and waiting to be used, so that it can be tuned up to a peak of perfection. Very often, it is not so much a question of adding to one's knowledge and skills as of developing what is already there – capacities of which we are sometimes barely aware. Frequently it is one's initial sense of mission which taps these inner resources.

Sometimes it is impossible to achieve distant goals without the aid of one's fellow-men, in which case, one has to develop the capacity to inspire the team spirit in others. Particularly in highly competitive situations, it is essential to be able to encourage other competent people to make a significant contribution to one's own performance.

But no one sails through life without bumping into obstacles and suffering a variety of setbacks. This is when one must beware of lapsing into passivity, when one has to take oneself firmly in hand and decide to look upon such things not as great gulfs from which one will never emerge, but simply as hurdles which have to be surmounted if one is to finish the race. One's initial feeling of disappointment should quickly transform itself into a greater determination to try harder, to alter one's approach, to seek different and better ways of achieving one's goal, and to channel one's energies more effectively towards their ultimate target.

7 August 1987

Submission to God

Henry de Castro, a senior French officer posted to Algeria during the days of the French occupation, was once leading a contingent of thirty Arab horsemen through the desert when he was informed by his men that the time had come for the afternoon prayer. Without further ado, they dismounted, and, without asking his permission, they gave the call to prayer, lined up in rows and began to pray. De Castro, affronted at what he considered arrogant and undisciplined behaviour on their part, nevertheless remained silent. Bringing his horse to a standstill, he observed his men at their devotions. Somehow these orderly rows of men engaged in earnest prayer made a deep impression upon him. Although he had at first felt that his men were guilty of insubordination, he became more and more touched by the humility with which they prostrated themselves before their Maker. He realized that it was certainly not pride which had made them act as they had. Later, when the prayer was over, he questioned them about it and listened attentively to everything they had to say. When he went back home, he began to make a study of Islam, first of all reading a French translation of the Quran, then traveling extensively in Arab countries to observe the Islamic way of life. His impressions of Islam became more and more profound and, eventually, he came within the fold. He later wrote a book in French on how he had come to accept Islam. This was translated into Arabic by the famous Egyptian writer, Fathi Zaghlul, and was published under the title of *Al-Islam: Khawater wa Sawaneh*. This recounts how it was the sight of God's servants bowing before Him which had awakened his true nature and inspired in him a feeling of submission to God.

8-9 August 1987

The Quran for Non-Muslims

At the beginning of his article, 'The Quran for Non-Muslims' (*Express Magazine*, May 17) Mr. Khushwant Singh has stated that 'some' of its prose is as powerful as that of the Old Testament.' Had the writer made his month-long study of the Quran in Arabic, and not through different English translations, he would have appreciated not just 'some' of its passages, but its entire text as a superb piece of literature.

He states that he failed to find anything in the Quran to the effect that the consumption of alcohol was *haram* (forbidden). To bear this out he has quoted extensively from passages which deal, not with the wine of this present world, but with the wine of Paradise, which will not "dull their senses" or "take away their reason." Having certainly confused his readers with this, he omits any mention of the 90th sura of the fifth chapter—'Believers, wine and games of chance – are abominations devised by the devil. Avoid them so that you may prosper,' – which surely makes it quite explicit that drinking is forbidden.

It is true that the word *haram* does not occur regarding wine in the Quran, but the confusion arises out of a misunderstanding of the Quranic terminology. The words in the verse (5:90), according to Quranic usage indicate forbidden things and quite adequately demonstrate that drinking comes into this category. So that there should be no doubt whatsoever on this subject, the Hadith, which is an authentic interpretation of the Quran, has specifically applied the word *haram* to wine.

He later alludes to Muslims' "single-minded devotion to a single book" (i.e. the Quran) in such a way as to suggest a mindless narrowness of purpose on the part of Muslims, supposedly resulting from their reading of the Quran. In this connection he relates the story of the burning, by Muslim conquerors, of the great library at Alexandria. Although he dubs this story 'apocryphal', he quotes in support of it what the reader is supposed to recognize as an Islamic sentiment: "If these other books agree with our Quran, they are superfluous and should be destroyed. And if they disagree with it, they are wrong and deserve to be destroyed."

If this had truly been the Muslims attitude, would they, in their heyday, been at such pains to translate books from all over the world into Arabic? Such an attitude could certainly never have existed, for the *Quran*, on the contrary, has always encouraged a broadening of the intellect through the spirit of scientific enquiry.

As for the destruction of the great library at Alexandria, this was actually the work of the Romans, about three centuries before Caliph Umar came to govern the country. It was a Christian by the name of Abul Farah Malti, who later falsely attributed this act to the Muslims so that Christians should not be accused

on wanton vandalism. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984) makes it adequately clear that the library at Alexandria "continued to exist under Roman rule until the third century A.D."

Modern historians have gone into considerable detail to confirm these facts. Philip K. Hitti states the case admirably in his *History of the Arabs*:

The story that by the Caliph's order' Amr for six long months fed the numerous bath furnaces of the city with the volumes of Alexandrian library is one of those tales that make good fiction but bad history. The great Ptolemaic Library was burnt as early as 48 B.C. by Julius Caesar. A later one, referred to as the Daughter Library, was destroyed about A.D. 389 as a result of an edict by the Emperor Theodosius. At the time of the Arab conquest, therefore, no library of importance existed in Alexandria and no contemporary writer ever brought the charge against 'Amr or 'Umar' (p. 166).

The truth is so well-substantiated that this hardly needs further comment.

9 August 1987

When Death is Nigh

Bilal ibn Ribah's household gathered to lament Bilal's approaching death. "There is no cause for lament," Bilal told them. "How good to think that tomorrow I will meet with my friends – Mohammad and his Companions." When death drew near Umar ibn Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam, exclaimed: "I shall consider myself successful if I come our equal, neither punishment nor reward."

10 August 1987

Getting the Image We Deserve

When Cat Stevens, the well-known English pop-singer, was studying Islam, he was told, "By all means study Islam, but do not, for the sake of God, study Muslims." He does not, however, seem to have been deterred by this paradoxical and clearly discouraging statement for he finally embraced Islam in 1977 in a London Mosque, taking the name of Yusuf Islam.

His views on this paradox were brought out in an interview which was published in, the May-June 1980 issue of the London monthly, Muslim. Asked what he thought would be a solution to the constant tirade of propaganda against Islam in the English press, he replied "People are not such simpletons that they would believe everything that is published in the newspapers. People do form their own opinions. However, if they found Muslims indulging in such evils as are mentioned, then it is quite possible that they would give credence to newspaper reports."

Facts are facts, but newspaper reporting does not necessarily do them justice. It is, therefore, upto Muslims to demonstrate that their way of life belies the image projected by the media, No intelligent reader will then give any serious attention to what are clearly distortions of the truth. If, for instance, it were reported in the newspapers that the illiteracy rate is highest among Christians, that beggars are greatest in number among Parsis and that the Sikh nation is the most timid, readers would simply dismiss these statements as the crassest idiocy for they are so obviously contrary to known facts.

If Muslim conduct is good, deprecating remarks about Islam will fall on stony ground. When people find from their own experience that Muslims deal justly with others, refusing to be provoked at every turn, that they honour the life and property of other human beings and that, above all, they are great seekers after the truth, they will attach no importance to adverse statements in the press. They will consider such reports baseless and will not even read beyond the heading.

10 August 1987

A blessing, not a curse

According to Abu Hurayra, someone said to the Prophet: "Curse the idolators." "I have not been sent as a curse." the Prophet replied, "I have been sent as a blessing."

(Hadith)

11 August 1987

The Lessons of Nature

In ancient times one of Adam's two sons killed the other. Now the murderer was faced with the problem of what to do with his brother's dead body. It was not until he saw a crow dig a hole in the ground to bury the carcass of another crow, that he realized what he must do. Nature had taught him the way.

Thus, at the very beginning of human history, God communicated to man the necessity to interpret His signs in the world around him. Everywhere there were lessons to be learned from nature.

One of the most important lessons that we can learn is from the habits of migratory birds.

"Most birds are gregarious during migration, even those that display a fierce individualism at all other times, such as many birds of prey and insectivorous passerines. Birds with similar habits sometimes travel together, a phenomenon observed among various species of shore – birds. Flocks sometimes show a remarkable cohesion, the most characteristic migratory formation of geese, ducks, pelicans, and cranes is a 'V' with the point turned in the direction of flights (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 12/181).

"Unity in diversity" an aphorism which should be known and appreciated by all mankind, is matter of sheer instinct with other living creatures. Man, to his great discredit, appears to be the only creature in this world who has not been able to learn this great universal reality from the lessons of nature.

11 August 1987

Excelling in actions rather than words

Imam Abdul Rahman Auzaa'i (88-157AH) was a great scholar, but he used to remain silent most of the time. Once he said: "A true believer speaks little and acts much, while a hypocrite speaks much and acts little,"

12 August 1987

Faith: the Great Discovery

The marked zeal and fervour which was found in the early pioneering Muslims is sadly absent in the present generation. How is this difference of attitude to be explained? It can perhaps be attributed to the fact that Islam was, to the pioneering Muslims a discovery – a new reality. For modern Muslims, Islam is, on the contrary, an imitative faith which has been handed down to them as a moral legacy by their forebears; it is not something for which they have toiled; it is not something they have discovered as a new and superior reality.

The experience of fresh enlightenment has a revitalizing effect upon a man's life, for it awakens in him to the highest degree aptitudes for thought and action which had hitherto lain dormant. The man who finds nothing new in life is like a sleepwalker, going through the motions of everyday existence like an automation. But the man who finds something new and of moral value in life is like one who has awakened from his slumber, moving from a state of mental inertia to that of the most acute cerebral activity.

Modern research tends to corroborate this thesis, one of the aims of this particular field of study having been to pinpoint the factor which prompted some people to greater activity than others. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984): "Psychological experiments in the fields of motivation and learning have disclosed the power of novelty as an inducement to action" (III/227).

Evidently the only way to awaken a living faith in the Muslims of today, is to make his faith once again a great discovery for him.

12 August 1987

Selflessness in worldly matters

Younus ibn Maysirah once observed: "Forbidding oneself lawful things is not the stuff of abstinence. Neither is the throwing away of one's property. Abstinence is to rely more on what is with God than on what one has oneself; it is to be the same when not afflicted by adversity as when one is; it is to be impartial in matters of right and wrong, not differentiating between those who praise and those who blame."

(Jamiul Uloom wa al-Hikam)

13-24 August 1987

Muslims and the Scientific Education

In this paper I shall go into the reason for Muslims – in India as well as in other countries – lagging behind in scientific education. Some say that the Muslims are backward in scientific education because their religion discourages them from acquiring it, or, at least, does nothing to encourage them to do so. But this is far from the truth.

Innumerable verses from the Quran and many sayings of the Prophet can be quoted which explicitly urge their readers to delve deeper into the mysteries of the earth and the heavens. How then is it possible that with such exhortations enshrined in their most sacred literature, Muslims, for whom Islam was and is a living thing, should not have engaged themselves in the observation of nature? which is what science is. It almost goes without saying that making a study of nature is to discover the Creator in His creation. That is the most wonderful benefit to be derived from such a study. Looked at in another way, in terms of worldly activity, the carrying out of, and body of knowledge to be gained from it, is what we commonly regard as science.

Moreover, Muslim history itself contradicts the supposition that Islam is an obstacle to scientific investigation. On the contrary, history testifies to the fact that, in the early Muslim period, great advances were made in various branches of science. In a period when Europe had not taken even one step forward in the sciences, Muslims had achieved phenomenal progress in these fields. Bertrand Russell has acknowledged this fact in these words:

"Our use of the phrase 'the Dark Ages' to cover the period from 600 to 1000 marks our undue concentration on Western Europe. In China this period includes the time of the Tang dynasty, the greatest age of Chinese poetry, and in many other ways a most remarkable epoch. From India to Spain, the brilliant civilization of Islam flourished. What was lost to Christendom at this time was not lost to civilization, but quite the contrary."

(*A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 395)

This paper was written for the Conference on Science Education, Aligarh, 15-17 January, 1986.

Ahead of their times

The achievements of Muslim scientists and doctors in the Middle Ages were indeed surprising because of their tremendous scope. Physicians such as Razi (865-932 AD) and Ibn Sina (980-1037 AD) stood head and shoulders above all contemporaries." Ibn Sina's book *Al-Qanun* became a classic and was used

in many medical schools at Montpellier, France, as late as 1650. The greatest contribution of Arabian medicine was in Chemistry, and in the knowledge and preparation of medicines; many drugs now in use are of Arab origin, and so also are such 'processes as distillation and sublimation.' But it is difficult to understand how these achievements came about at a time when, in the words of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "often the chemistry of that time was mainly a search for the philosopher's stone, which would supposedly turn all common metals to gold. Astronomers were astrologers and chemists were alchemists. It is, therefore, surprising that, despite all this, the physicians of the Muslim empire did make a noteworthy contribution to medical progress (11/828).

This fact has been universally acknowledged by historians, but this is not all that there is to the matter. We must go one step further, and add that the modern sciences are the very creation of Islam. I do not mean to say that Islam was revealed for the purposes of science. But there is no doubting the fact that the scientific revolution is a by-product of the Islamic revolution. This relation between Islam and Science has been acknowledged by Briffault in these words:

The debt of our science to that of the Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries of revolutionary theories; science owes a great deal more to Arab culture, it owes its existence. The ancient world was, as we saw, pre-scientific. The Astronomy and Mathematics of the Greeks were a foreign importations never thoroughly acclimatized to Greek culture. The Greek systematized, generalized, and theorized, but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation and experimental inquiry were altogether alien to the Greek temperament. Only in Hellenistic Alexandria was any approach to scientific work conducted in the ancient classical world. What we called science arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, of the development of Mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs.

(Making of Humanity, p. 190)

Worship of Nature

It is an academic and historical truth that Islam is the creator of modern science. What is science? It is simply the name of the study of nature. Since time immemorial, since man has existed in this world, he has been observing nature. Then what explains the delay in studying and conquering it? All the developments of science have taken place only within the span of the past one thousand years, whereas they should have come into existence millions of years ago. It was the dominance of animism (Shirk) in ancient times that hindered man from studying nature, discovering its forces and utilizing them. What is animism? It is the worship of nature, says Toynbee:

(For the ancient man) Nature was not just a treasure-trove of natural resources, but a goddess, Mother Earth. And the vegetation that sprang from the earth, the animals that

roamed the earth's surface, and the minerals hiding in the earth's bowels, all partook of nature's divinity. So did all natural phenomena, springs and rivers and the sea – mountains, earthquakes, and lightening and thunder.

Everything on earth and in the sky, – the trees, the stars, the sun – all that seemed extraordinary, was thus regarded as being imbued with divinity. Such is the stuff of animism. And it was ideas such as these which dominated the human mind throughout much of the inhabited world before Islam.

To ancient man, nature was an object of veneration. How then was it possible for it to become an object of investigation? Herein lies the real reason for ancient man's disinclination to make a study of it.

Having accorded nature the status of divinity, man then proceeded to worship it. Such reverence became an obstacle to investigation. Bending nature to the ends of civilization obviously became an impossibility. Arnold Toynbee has acknowledged that this prolonged age of nature worship was put an end, to for the first time by monotheism. The faith of monotheism led man to realize that nature, far from being the creator, was merely the thing created. It was a thing to be exploited – not a thing to be worshipped. It was meant to be conquered not revered. This concept of monotheism, which had fallen into desuetude, was revived by Islam, hence the revolution in modern human thought is directly traceable to Islam. There is no doubting the fact that the message with which all of the prophets had been sent was that of pure monotheism. In every age, every prophet had preached monotheism pure and simple, but never in human history had it been possible before Islam to bring about a revolution on such a basis. That is why it was only with the advent of Islam that man could share the fruits of monotheism.

While we accept that all the prophets were the harbingers of true monotheism, we have to admit that their followers failed to preserve their religious teachings in the original form. Their main error was to adulterate this true concept with polytheism. For example, Jesus Christ perpetuated the tenets of monotheism, but his followers accorded the status of divinity to Jesus himself.

This distorted belief in many ways retarded scientific progress. For instance, when certain astronomers carried out research on the solar system, and came to the conclusion that the earth revolved around the sun, they were severely opposed by Christian clergymen, the reason being that their beliefs were misguided. If the earth was truly the birthplace of the Son of God, it seemed to them unthinkable that such an earth could possibly be a mere satellite instead of being the centre of the solar system. In order to defend their distorted beliefs they refused to acknowledge the scientific fact.

The Role of Islam

Where the previous prophets of old had gone no further than proclaiming the truth, and had not been able to bring about a revolution on the basis of their teachings, the Prophet of Islam and his Companions made monotheism a living concept. They were the first such group ever to bring about such a revival in human history.

First of all, they completely eradicated all forms of polytheism and animism in Arabia, and based their lives, in practice, on monotheistic belief. Then they forged ahead to replace polytheism with monotheism throughout the known inhabited world. They destroyed all the idols and the edifices which protected them in the lands that they conquered in Asia and Africa, thus giving monotheism its place on a universal scale. This fact has been acknowledged by orientalists. We quote here from Dr. Michael Hart's book "*The 100*", published in New York. Of the Prophet, it says, "He was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels."

This universal monotheistic revolution brought about by Islam made it possible to bring the age of superstition to an end. The phenomenon of nature was displaced from its pedestal of worship for man. Everything else was a mere object of creation. A famous American Encyclopaedia rightly says of Islam: "Its advent changed the course of human history".

With the ousting of the phenomenon of nature from its place as an object of worship, it immediately assumed its rightful role – an object of investigation and conquest. This process originated in Medina in the 7th century AD, then was passed on to the centres of the Muslim empire, Damascus and Baghdad, later crossing the sea and entering Spain and Sicily. It surged even further forward and reached Italy and France. This historical process continued till the modern scientific revolution was brought to maturity. The modern western revolution of science is thus the culmination of the Islamic revolution.

Muslims of Today

Now a question does arise here. How is it that the Muslims of today, who are the followers of that same Islam which taught science to the whole world in its initial stages, are at present lagging far behind others in scientific education? The sole reason is political. The scientific revolution brought about by Muslims in their initial stage of growth was diverted to other western nations via Spain. Afterwards most of the progress in science was made by Europeans. Although, during this time, most parts of the world still politically remained in the hands of the Muslims; scientific development was continuously going on in western Europe after the crusades. The major advances in the field of science by Muslims at this early stage of their development ultimately took concrete shape in their victory at the end of the crusades which lasted 200 years from 1095 to 1270. In these wars almost the whole of Europe unitedly attacked the Muslim world in order to recapture their holy places from it, but to no avail. On this subject Pears Encyclopaedia says:

Millions of lives and an enormous amount of treasure were sacrificed in these enterprises.
And when all was done, Jerusalem remained in the possession of the 'infidels'.

The end of the crusades meant total victory for Muslims and total defeat for Christian Europe. Paradoxically, the victory, far from being a great gain, proved to be a great setback for Muslims. The Christians, in spite of their total defeat, were the greatest beneficiaries. This was because the Muslims fell to rejoicing over their victory and, becoming complacent, neglected to remain alert to the

movements of the enemy. The gratification that came with such phenomenal success was enough to slow, if not destroy all potential development.

Christian Europe, on the other hand, greatly benefited from its defeat. There began a process of rethinking among them which made them conscious of their weaknesses and of the necessity to obviate them. Such was the thinking of those who openly advocated the necessity to learn Arabic, the language of the Muslims, and to translate all the important books from Arabic into Latin. This movement quickly gained ground, and most of the books by Muslim scholars were indeed translated into Latin, the academic language of Europe in those days.

This process went on for many centuries. While Muslims were savouring their success and wasting their energies, Christian Europe had taken up the challenge in real earnest – launching “spiritual crusades” as they termed it – and having thrown themselves into the task with such enthusiasm and energy, they made consistently good progress.

This journey of Europe continued till 18th-century achievements made it obvious to all and sundry that Europe had left the Muslims far behind. Western Europe was now leading the world in modern science and technology. It replaced the hand by the machine. Manual labour was now replaced by mechanization. Moreover, it invented long-range weapons greatly in contrast to the old style of weapons which were only suitable for hand-to-hand fighting. First it held sway over the land, then the sea, then the air. Man and animal power gave way to the machine, sails gave way to steam and, finally, heavier-than-air matter was lifted off the ground. With such land, sea and air power, the west had become a force which the Muslims could not fend off with their existing means and resources. Thus equipped with all the paraphernalia of modernity, the west entered into the Muslim world, but the Muslims, in their state of inertia, failed to arrest their advance. The western nations, directly or indirectly, quickly gained control over the whole of the Muslim world.

Negative Attitude

In centuries gone by, Muslims had lagged behind in science as a result of the complacency which had set in after their political victory in the crusades. Now in the present world, the same backwardness has taken another form. The political subjugation of Muslims by western nations from colonial times onwards had brought with it a negative reaction against their enemies, the western nations had taken away their pride, so the Muslims came to hate them. Because of this negative psychology, they not only opposed the western nations, but also their languages and sciences. Much of this attitude persists today.

A whole century was frittered away during the colonial period in futile opposition. Muslims continued to despise western nations and waged war against them, which, because of inadequate preparation on the part of the Muslims, only ended in defeat. On the other hand, other communities of the world were rapidly learning western languages and science and it was inevitable that a big gap should have developed between the Muslims and the other communities, one example of which can be seen in India.

Mr. Kuldip Nayyer has written that Muslims are two hundred years behind in education as compared to their Hindu compatriots. Even if we feel that Mr. Nayyer's estimate is somewhat exaggerated, we shall still have to concede that Muslims are at least one hundred years behind.

The sciences cultivated by western nations were not simply sciences, they were the foundations of all kinds of progress in the modern world – the power of the day. That is why all those nations who bent their minds to those sciences made advances. The western nations and their followers became far superior in culture and civilization to Muslims.

It is at this time that Sir Syed Ahmed and many other reformers appear on the scene. Moved by the plight of their brethren, they strongly advocated following the west. But in their approach to handling the situation, they made the third mistake. Impressed by the apparent glitter of western civilization, they did not seek to go deeper to find its true sources of strength. They stepped towards the west, but turned towards its culture and not towards the adoption of its sciences which were its real source of power.

Thus even when they made a bid to draw near to the west, they failed to benefit from it. When Sir Syed Ahmed Khan traveled to England, the special gift that he chose to bring from there was a sofa set. Had he brought instead some books of science or some machine, that would certainly have been a far better gift to present to Indian Muslims. Even when after great delay, Muslims did enter the field of western education, they still held themselves apart from the scientific world, having made the fundamental error of holding the philosophic, literary and artistic aspects of western culture to be of ultimate importance.

A Verbal Controversy

Latter-day Muslim reformers, who have recognised the need to propagate modern sciences and western learning amongst Muslims, have, by and large, based their arguments on verses from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet which lay stress on the importance of learning (Al-Ilm). Such arguments, far from proving definitive, have stirred up controversies between religious and secular scholars, the former holding that those verses and sayings of the Prophet which emphasize the acquisition of learning refer to religious learning, and not to worldly sciences with their connotations of materialism. Muslim reformers insist that injunctions on learning refer to both the religious and the secular knowledge. This controversy, which began a century ago, shows few signs of being resolved.

So far as the verses which deal with learning are concerned, there is surely room for both interpretations. But no matter whether one group takes them to apply to religious learning while another group relates them to secular learning, the importance of modern science simply cannot be denied. It may be an object of heated controversy, but its final acceptance is just as important to Muslims as it is to other nations and communities. Here is a verse from the Quran which not only approves of the acquisition of modern sciences, but which holds it to be the duty of Muslims to pursue them.

"Muster against them all the force and cavalry at your disposal, so that you may strike terror into the enemies of God" (8:60).

We are therein commanded by God to make ourselves strong so that our adversaries may be overawed. The notion of strength (Quwwah) in this verse applies, surely, to all things which, at any given time, confer power upon their possessors: this may be the power of ideas, or the power of material things – either or both, depending upon the exigencies of the times.

It is an indisputable fact that modern scientific learning is a force in this day and age. Today it is those nations which are advanced in science and technology which have real strength as compared with their more backward neighbours. We must be realistic and accept the fact that the awe inspired in one nation by another is to a very great extent the result of the acquisition of scientific learning.

Even if the importance of modern, scientific education is not underscored by the verses which deal with learning (Al-Ilm), it is certainly testified to by the verses which deal with the necessity for power (Al-Quwwah). Whether Muslims bow to the wisdom of the verses on learning or the verses on strength, it is clearly their bounden duty to create conditions which are favourable to the inception and growth of scientific education in their own community.

Scientific Consciousness

The principal reason for Muslims' backwardness in the field of science can be summed up in one phrase – lack of consciousness.

Just as the Indian landlord class was pushed into the background because of a lack of awareness in the field of business, so were Muslims left behind others because the scientific consciousness which ought to have developed in them had for various reasons been stultified. If they paid scant attention to science, it was partly because their respective attitudes towards religion and scientific education stood so at variance with each other. Aware of the importance of religious education, they made elaborate arrangements for its propagation on a large scale. But, since they did not grasp the importance of scientific education, they did little or nothing to set up an infrastructure for its dissemination. Without this no nation can be adequately educated.

After a long period of intellectual stagnation, our leaders eventually realised the importance of such education and, rousing themselves from the state of inertia into which they had sunk, they set up universities and colleges. What they failed to do, however, was to establish a network of primary and secondary schools which would provide a solid grounding in elementary education and eventually 'feed' the institutions of higher learning. Our predecessors had not neglected establishing religious schools at the elementary level, but their successors completely forgot to perform this all important task.

In the past, when great religious institutions were set up, they could hope to draw on a countrywide network of schools for their student population. There is no village or town where there is not one or

more such schools. It should be obvious that in the absence of such educational facilities our universities and colleges are bound to remain deserted, but Muslim leaders appear to have lost sight of this very basic requirement. This is all the more surprising since the example of the large-scale efforts of Hindus and Christians was already there for everyone to see.

Muslims, for religious reasons, have always been disinclined to send their children to Hindu, Christian or government schools. In the absence then of Muslim schools of a good standard, these children have, through no fault of their own, been unable to qualify themselves for advanced studies. This shortcoming in the educational structure of the Muslim community – the result of negligence on the part of our leaders – has nipped many a bright young career in the bud, and has been a major factor generally in Muslims lagging behind others in scientific education.

Fundamental Negligence

Just as many of those who came under the domination of the English, failed, in their hatred of the conquerors, to differentiate between English and the English, coming to despise the language along with the people, so Muslims did not make the distinction between the men and their sciences. Hating the conquerors, they rejected their learning. Had they been able to separate the two, the history of their own scientific achievement would have been very different. It is a mistake to think of science as being the private property of any particular nation. It is, after all, the study of nature, universal in its scope and applications, and a common asset of humanity. Nor is it purely a matter of tradition, whether ethnic or political.

The western nations were at the time of the crusades in the same situation as latter-day Muslims. At that time, it was the Muslims who bore aloft the torch of scientific learning while their adversaries had sunk into the intellectual sloth of the Dark Ages. It was, indeed, by virtue of this scientific learning that they succeeded in emerging triumphant from two centuries of arduous warfare. But, although the western nations hated their conquerors in the way that all vanquished peoples do, they did not commit the folly of rejecting their sciences, for they saw these sciences as being distinct from the individuals who purveyed them. Furthermore, owing to their diligence and perseverance, they were able to make such a significant contribution to their development that, in the centuries to come, they became leaders in every field of those sciences. A time came when they succeeded in changing the whole course of human history.

The situation faced by Muslims in the modern world was no different. But in a situation where the west was the oppressor and the Muslims the oppressed, the latter allowed their aversion for the former to blind them to the virtues of the learning that the west had to offer. They failed to realize that this was not something national and traditional, but universal, the acquisition of which brought power with it. Had the Muslim leaders of modern times understood this in time, the destinies of their followers would have taken a vastly different course. Indeed, this was a fault of the moment, but its consequences shall have to be suffered for centuries to come. It is one of the great ironies of history that Muslims, because of their lack of consciousness, have become the losers not only in defeat, but also in victory.

24 August 1987

In the Name of God

"God is great and no other is great". This is an acknowledgement of an external reality. The words, "I am small," show one's preparedness to mould oneself to it. Satan knew that God was great, but he did not accept that he himself was small, and thus became a mine of evil and corruption for all time. Hitler too was aware of God's greatness, but of his own smallness he had no inkling. It was thus that he finally ranked among the most contumacious and wicked human beings of all time.

There are many people who make the same mistake and imagine that simply by taking the name of God, they themselves turn into gods. Not appreciating that there is nothing lowlier than themselves, they mindlessly enter into conflict with others, whereas their acknowledgement of God's greatness should have taken away the urge in them to fight. They hurl invective at others, whereas consciousness of the divinity of God should so fill their hearts that they should find it impossible to indulge in such abuse.

Every truth is but a shadow of itself until man discovers his own position in relation to it. To say that God is great is only half of the truth. The other half is man's acceptance in all humility, of his own lowness.